



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Town Meeting Minutes September 9, 2020 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone and email.

Call to Order 7:00 p.m.

Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Chris Brittan-Powell, Jason Papanikolas, and Ethan Sweep. Also present were Interim Town Manager (ITM) Laura Allen, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Chief Kenneth Antolik, Lt. Daniel Unger, Cpl Scott Krouse, Manns Woodward Architects Rob Manns and Mike Gerding, Education Advisory Committee Chairs Allison Holmes and Joanna Whitaker, Historical Committee Chair Richard Ahrens, and Recreation Council President Susan Jones.

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey made announcements about students completing the first week of school in virtual format, the State of Maryland moving to phase 3 of reopening, Prince George's County remaining in phase 2 due to infection rates, options for voting in the Presidential Election, the passing of long-term resident Louise Barkeley, and Mayor Dewey's appointment to the MML Legislative Committee.

2. Approval of the Agenda

On a motion by MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved and second by CM Papanikolas the agenda was approved 5 to 0.

3. Approval of Minutes

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Sweep seconded to approve the August 12 Town meeting minutes. The minutes were approved 5-0. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved and CM Sweep moved to approve the August 17 worksession minutes. The minutes were approved 5-0.

4. Mayor's Report

Mayor Dewey reported in detail about available voting options in the Presidential Election, including early voting, Election Day voting and voting by absentee ballot. Further, the school supply drive continues through September 13. The Town Manager search is moving forward, and residents will have the opportunity to provide input online and through the Bulletin. The 2020 Census will conclude at the end of September and everyone who has not yet responded can still do so online or by phone.

Prince George's County has started a childcare provider COVID-19 recovery program, with grant applications opening today. Prince George's County Schools are providing free meals to all students aged 2-18. No ID is required to pick them up. A moratorium on utility shutoffs has been extended to

November 15. No utility shutoffs will be performed on customers who are enrolled in a utility assistance program. The CDC has ordered a halt on all evictions until the end of the year but any lessee unable to pay rent must provide a form to their landlord, which they can find by searching “OMB 0920-1303” online.

CM Sweep announced that Prince George’s County is hiring election judges for the Presidential Election. Due to the pandemic, younger residents starting at age 16 are encouraged to apply.

5. Department Reports

Administration: CM Papanikolas said that the Town’s finances have so far remained stable. The revenue picture will become clearer as real property taxes and income taxes start to come in. In the big picture, Maryland’s unemployment rate continues to decline and now stands at 7.6%, the best record among Mid-Atlantic states. Prince George’s County’s unemployment is somewhat higher than the state’s but has fallen for the third month in a row.

In response to CM Brittan Powell, CM Papanikolas said the Council agreed to hold off on major purchases until revenues are in the bank. This concerns particularly road repair projects funded largely from the State’s Highway User Revenues. Mayor Dewey added that MML predicts municipal budgets will be affected by the pandemic for 2-3 years as the economy slowly recovers.

Mayor Dewey asked for a motion to receive all department reports for the record. CM Sweep so moved. CM Papanikolas seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Town Manager’s Report: ITM Allen announced that the Associate Director of the County’s Stormwater Management Division has agreed to attend the October 5 worksession and wants to tailor his remarks to Berwyn Heights’ concerns. Any questions for the Director can be emailed to ITM Allen. Chief Antolik led a County-wide meeting on the Ambassador program, in which the Berwyn Heights Police and Code Department participate. The program monitors businesses for compliance with COVID-19 protocols. The Town’s server was out today but has been repaired. ITM Allen will propose to replace the server in the near future, which will require a budget amendment.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy sought clarification about the Treasurer’s report regarding high expenses in the Administration Department salaries line item and the Municipal Building water line item. ITM Allen said she will check into these expenses.

Parks, Recreation, Education & Civic Affairs: MPT Kulpa-Eddy announced that the comment period for the I-270 and I-495 Managed Lanes Study Draft Environmental Impact Statement has been extended to November 9.

Public Works: CM Sweep reported that Public Works continues to collect trash and recyclables as usual. He asked whether the Town has any updates on abatement of litter problems along the Indian Creek stream valley park. ITM Allen said that Park & Planning has agreed to provide new trash cans with lids for the playground and new trash cans have been added at Lake Artemesia.

In response to questions from participants, Mayor Dewey said that the food scraps recycling vendor does not provide volume information on what is collected but can provide information on whether bins were full or not. Suggestions on how homeowners store food scraps at home include placing them into a small bucket, such as ice cream bucket, or a bowl that can be emptied into the containers at Town Hall. Compostable bags can be placed in the compost bins, but residents are reminded that traditional plastic bags cannot be placed in recycling or compost bins.

Code Compliance: CM Brittan Powell reported that the Code Department still operates in COVID mode. ITM Allen informed that the Code car had an expensive repair job but does not believe this indicates a larger problem with vehicle repairs.

Public Safety: Mayor Dewey reminded residents that the pandemic is not over, and everyone should continue to social distance and wear a mask. BHPD and the Code Department are reaching out to Town businesses about compliance with COVID protocols and ensuring that they have what they need to operate safely. BHPD will host another *Coffee with a Cop* on September 11 via Facebook live.

In response to Council questions, Lt. Unger provided information on security cameras in Town. He said BHPD has previously looked into adding surveillance cameras around the Town Center. The cameras are expensive as they run on a wireless network. BHPD is happy to research the options if there still is interest. Most Town businesses have their own security systems. Mayor Dewey and CM Sweep noted that public opinion in last year's citizen survey was divided regarding the installation of security cameras, with many respondents expressing privacy concerns.

In response to further questions, Mayor Dewey said that the Ambassador Program is for monitoring businesses' compliance with COVID protocols. If residents have concerns about private gatherings they may call a County hotline. Chief Antolik said Berwyn Heights and neighboring jurisdictions are experiencing higher rates of thefts from vehicles, probably due to the economic downturn. However, he does not advocate for the Neighborhood Watch to become more active because its members are mostly elderly. He will reach out to NW/EP about setting up a virtual meeting.

6. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: EAC Chairs Allison Holmes and Joanna Whitaker were present. Ms. Holmes reported that the Committee's focus has been on supporting parents with virtual schooling. This includes families whose children attend private schools or are home-schooled.

Green Team: Mayor Dewey reported that the Green Team continues to go through the Sustainable Maryland recertification process, which is now in the second round. The Committee is also contributing to the Pop's Park redesign effort, has started to pursue Bee City USA certification, and thinking about how to structure meetings and processes to reach the goal of greater diversity and inclusion. The Green Team's summer program is coming to a close. Participants should submit their work to the Green Team's website at www.berwynheightsgreenteam.wordpress.com.

Historical Committee: Historical Committee Chair Richard Ahrens gave the report. The Historical Committee erected a new historic marker in August at 8403 58th Avenue. The house was built by the Benson family, and served as the local office of the Berwyn Heights Company. More information can be found on the [BHHC website](#), and [Facebook page](#). Several BHHC members attended the open house for *Sportland*, the oldest house in Berwyn Heights and, in the 1920s, the site of a professional boxing ring. At the last meeting, a new resident, Sierra Langford, participated, who may be interested in joining the Committee. At the next meeting, ITM Allen will be in attendance and the BHHC will hold its annual election.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy added, at the last meeting, she raised the issue of reviewing BHHC markers and signage for proper contextualization of the content. She does not expect to find anything problematic but would like to be proactive. Clerk Harper said the markers and their locations are listed on the BHHC website.

Recreation Council: Recreation Council President Susan Jones gave the report. She said this month's food drive and school supply drive will both end on September 18. The last virtual summer concert will be given by Berwyn Heights singer songwriter Mike Hummel on September 17. All concerts remain available on the [Recreation Council's Youtube](#) channel. In October, the Committee will host a Halloween home decorating contest and an [Instagram costume contest](#) for kids.

Ms. Jones asked if the Town has made a decision on whether to allow trick or treating this year. Mayor Dewey replied Chief Antolik and ITM Allen are working on the issue but don't have an answer tonight. Ms. Jones continued, the Committee will host a virtual Trivia Night on November 13, coordinated by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, and in December, a virtual Christmas tree lighting, which may include a sing-a-long and a neighborly zoom meeting.

Mr. Jones asked if there will be a ballot drop box at Berwyn Heights Elementary School. Mayor Dewey said currently BHES is not a drop box location, but several mayors have requested that each municipality be given one.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness (discussed out of order): Mike Attick called to report on plans of the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee to get back up and running. The target date is January or February 2021.

7. Discussion Only

Learning Pods: Mayor Dewey welcomed the Chairs of the Education Advisory Committee (BHEAC). She said the Committee has worked on supporting Berwyn Heights families with virtual schooling, in particular the creation of learning pods (groups of multiple families that meet in-person to study together). The Committee approached the Town about hosting a learning pods program. The Town has discussed the matter at a previous meeting and has since asked for input and advice from BHPD, the Town Attorney and the Town's insurance company to help address concerns about safety and liability. The discussion continues tonight to see how the proposal might be moved forward.

BHEAC Chair Allison Holmes said the Committee is now looking into the *Join my Pod* platform for creating learning pods. This platform is more secure than the Google form the BHEAC designed in that it requires setting up a passworded account, and private information is shared in a more limited way. Most existing pods are formed at a school or classroom level, but a new feature allows for learning partners to be matched at a community level.

Ms. Holmes said she and Ms. Whitaker have reached out to local schools to determine if they are willing to facilitate parents' creation of learning pods. BHES has agreed to do so through its *Community Engagement Assistant* who would publicize information about the platform as well as useful resources the BHEAC has identified, e.g. coronavirus safety guidelines and a sample consent form. It is hoped that other schools will also consider this model. The Town would therefore not need to be directly involved.

ITM Allen said she is pleased the BHES Community Engagement Assistant can take on this project and asked Chief Antolik if BHPD can lend its support in terms of background checks. Chief Antolik said BHPD could perform a modified background check to look for 'sex offender' status of participating adults, accompanied by a signed disclaimer. BHPD would not perform fingerprinting or a full background check.

The Council agreed it is better to have the school system support the formation of learning pods rather than the Town and thanked the BHEAC chairs for their hard work on getting this program started.

8. Old Business

BHES Funding Request – Reallocation of Funding: Mayor Dewey explained that the Council recently approved a grant for BHES to purchase math software for virtual learning. The software has now been approved for purchase by PGCPS. The school is asking whether the Town Council would allow the funds to be used for purchases of books instead.

In discussion, the Council sought more information on what types of books would be purchased, possibly in the form of documents that document the purchase. CM Papanikolas said he believes the books are novels to support the school's reading program. School staff could likely provide the details.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved and CM Sweep seconded to approve the reallocation of funding, contingent on the school providing 1) a report at the end of each semester; 2) itemized list of books purchased and 3) a statement on how the books support a curriculum standard. The motion passed 5-0.

Greater Riverdale Cares Proposal: Mayor Dewey explained that she was approached by a non-profit organization, *Greater Riverdale Cares*, which was joined by *Route 1 Cares*, about financial support. The organization is funded by private and public donations through the online *GoFundMe* platform and purchases meals from local restaurants for distribution to families in need. Berwyn Heights has shared information about the program on its social media and proposed a few nearby restaurants for participation in the program in discussion at a previous worksession, and the organization subsequently submitted a request for funding. A financial contribution might come from a miscellaneous line item in Town Council budget or through a CARES act reimbursement.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The Town's limited resources do not allow for supporting all worthy causes;
- It is unknown how many Berwyn Heights businesses or residents would benefit from the program, especially as there are not many family-owned restaurants in Town;
- The Town might consider matching private donations from Town residents;
- The Town has no policy for deciding which charitable organizations to support;
- Priority should be given to programs that have a direct impact on Berwyn Heights.

The Council agreed to continue to publicize the program, but not to make a financial contribution.

9. New Business

Manns Woodward Architects Presentation: Mayor Dewey welcomed Rob Manns and Mike Gerding of Manns Woodward Architects for a presentation on a police station feasibility study on the Town Center property. Mr. Manns gave an overview of the study's findings with respect to the existing site conditions, and the spatial needs of the future facility, which would house the Police, Code and Administration Departments, as well as the Council chamber.

Mr. Manns made the following principal points:

- The placement and size of a new or expanded multi-purpose facility is limited by a large stormwater drain and a sewer line that cross the property, as well as lot setback requirements. Modifying or moving the pipes to enlarge the developable area of approximately 8,500 square feet would require further engineering analyses and would be expensive.
- A preliminary assessment of the current Town office building suggests it would not be suitable for expansion and/or addition of a second story due to wood frame construction and inadequate ceiling height, footings and foundation. Today's building codes mandate higher building standards, especially for a public safety facility, than the Town office building possesses.

- Interviews conducted with the Police Chief and staff yielded space requirements for each departmental function totaling 13,400 square feet and costing approximately \$4,855,000. The price tag represents an investment into a robust facility that would last for a generation.
- Construction costs are increasing more slowly during the current COVID recession and could yield savings if the Town were to go out to bid in the near future.

Mr. Manns sought feedback from the Council regarding the described building program. He also asked whether the Town owns alternative properties on which a police station or a municipal complex could plausibly be built.

Councilmembers asked questions about moving the sanitary sewer line, parking requirements, stormwater management and disposition of the raingardens, planning for a changing workplace environment, viability of expanding the current Town office, including adding a basement; and options for reducing cost. In response, Mr. Manns said it would be more efficient and less costly to replace the current structure rather than expand it. To achieve cost savings, construction quality could be reduced or programmed space eliminated.

In terms of alternative sites, the Town might explore whether the Volunteer Fire Department is interested in investing in a joint public safety complex on a property it owns near the current fire house. Another option is for the Town to purchase property on which to build a police station.

Mr. Manns offered to contact the Volunteer Fire Department about their plans for a new facility to which the Council agreed.

Resolution 14-2020 Council Rules Amendments: Mayor Dewey explained this Resolution amends the Council Rules to ensure a more orderly agenda process by setting an earlier deadline for submitting agenda items and posting of agenda. The current deadline would be moved back from the current 24 hours to 72 hours prior to a meeting, including items submitted by citizens. This will give staff more time to prepare the agenda and for the Council and citizens to review the background materials. Additionally, provisions were added to clarify that formal actions would only be taken at Town meetings and to set forth a process for submitting urgent, late-breaking items to the agenda.

CM Sweep moved to adopt the Resolution. CM Papanikolas seconded. With no further discussion, the motion passed 5 to 0.

10. Citizen Discussion

There was none.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk